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Ministry of Forests

WESTBANK PACT WILL CREATE JOBS, PROVIDE CERTAINTY

KELOWNA – The Westbank First Nation and Forests Minister Michael de Jong signed an interim measures agreement today that will increase the band's participation in the forest sector through the award of a community forest pilot agreement.

"We made a New Era commitment to work to expedite interim measures agreements with First Nations to help create jobs and provide greater economic certainty," said de Jong. "Today's agreement will lead to new opportunities for the Westbank First Nation and provide a basis for better working relationships between government, Westbank and local forest companies."

The community forest pilot agreement, allowing Westbank to harvest 55,000 cubic metres of timber a year, forms a key part of the interim measures agreement. The Westbank First Nation will be able to begin harvesting once they have submitted their business and management plan and the Minister of Forests has approved it. This is expected to happen by the end of the year.

Since June 1, 2001, the government has signed 22 interim measures and 25 treaty-related measures totalling $3.6 million.

"We've already started work on our business plan for the community forest pilot project," said Chief Robert Louie. "For too long we've been left out of economic opportunities, but today we can start building our skills in the forest sector."

The five-year interim measures agreement will also create a joint forest council with membership from the Ministry of Forests and the Westbank First Nation to provide a forum to discuss forest management issues in Westbank's traditional territory. The agreement also commits the Minister of Forests and the Westbank First Nation to meet annually to review progress on the implementation of the interim measures agreement.

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